# HUMAN SEXUALITY and SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

*A statement adopted by the Tenth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church (GC80.4.43), October 1980, "as a statement of comment and counsel addressed to the member congregations of The American Lutheran Church, and their members individually, for their consideration and such action as they may deem appropriate." Ballot vote tally: Yes—812; No—104; Abstain—15.*

## A. BUILDING A FOUNDATION

### 1. Defining Key Terms

1.1. Human sexuality includes all that we are as human beings. Sexuality at the very least is biological, psychological, cultural, social, and spiritual. It is as much of the mind as of the body, of the community as of the person. To be a person is to be a sexual being.

1.2. Sexual behavior includes what we do with our sexuality. In general it is the way male and female relate to God, to neighbor, to nature, to the structures of society, and to self. Sexual behavior acts out the special qualities and abilities male and female uniquely bring toward wholeness in the human community. Most specifically sexual behavior acts out the pleasure-producing, self-fulfilling sensations of sexual arousal and release. Sexual behavior is sensuous in the fullest sense of that word.

### 2. Honoring God's Gift

2.1. We believe that God created all that is, seen and unseen. With the psalmist (Ps. 8:4-6) we praise God for his magnificent creation, human life. "In his own image . . . male and female . . . he created them . . . and God saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:27-31). Our conviction is that God created all human beings. Each is unique; each has a special identity; each receives individual abilities and opportunities to use them; each is called to use the gift of life in service to God, to neighbor, and to self. Sexual human life is a gracious gift, a sacred trust, from God.

2.2. That we are sensuous beings also is a gift and a trust from God. The human capacity to participate in sexual behavior is God's design for continuing the human race. Sexual behavior also can fulfill the divine design for enhancing the joy and renewing the vows of love and marriage. It can be a means for knowing oneself and growing as a person. Based on mutual trust and commitment it can be a person-to-person exercise of honor and dignity, of respect for self and the other, of forgiveness and acceptance of the imperfections of each. We reject the view that sexual behavior in and of itself is evil, lustful, unmentionable, a duty to be done, a burden to be borne. We repent for the fact that Christians so often have taught such false views. We do not, however, accept the view that

sexual intercourse or sexual satisfaction is the highest or noblest goal in human life. The God-given sacredness and joy of sexual behavior must be placed in the context of the total range of a person's relationships. Sexual behavior must be viewed in the perspective also of growth, of wholeness, of fulfillment of self and other, of the striving to accomplish in family and community the best that life under God can offer.

2.3. In Jesus Christ God became human, in body and form like other human beings. The Incarnation supports the Christian conviction that the human body is to be held in honor, considered sacred (Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 6:19-20). Christians see themselves as part of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12), with him as the head who unites all the members into a mature, smoothly functioning entity (Eph. 4:15-16; also Rom. 12:4-8). Sexual language is implicit in 1 Corinthians 12:22-25. Scriptural counsel holds that one's sexuality is to be treated with honor and with modesty, that sexual behavior is an expression of stewardship.

### 3. Building Our Witness

3.1. The church builds its witness to human sexuality and sexual behavior on biblical, theological, historical, psychological, and sociological grounds. Biblical research continues unabated, along with the general explosion of human inquiry and knowledge. Theology declares and introduces God and his activity to an ever-changing world. History requires constant review, interpretation, and perhaps reinterpretation. Psychology explores ever-larger realms of the human spirit. The social sciences describe the workings of the social systems, the fractured nature of the human community, and their combined impact upon people. The church sees God and his love for the world as the only constant. Its task is to bring the ongoing message of God's offer of reconciliation to the people of each generation. Its urgency is that each new generation, while there is yet time, be made aware of God's grace, God's purposes, and God's power. Its basic witness is biblical.

3.2. Among central themes Lutheran Christians bring to bear upon issues of human sexuality and sexual behavior are:

(a) *creation,* a goodness derived from God as creator, a reverence for all that sustains life, a respect for human reason and skills that expand the horizons of knowledge;

(b) *the fall,* a recognition that it is not within the power of humans to eliminate the condition called sin nor to control by fully good intention either the power or the effects of what is called evil;

(c) *atonement through suffering,* confessing that the suffering of Christ on the cross is our warrant for affirming that God works through not only the joys and pleasures but also the sufferings and disappointments of human sexuality and sexual behavior;

(d) *the spirit,* whose sustaining work interrelates all living creatures, making them interdependent with the whole of creation and the quality of life on the earth, so that no single life can be valued apart from all life;

(e) *the evangelical ethic,* admitting that the ambiguity of decision making requires making the best possible judgments based on the available information, relying on the mercy of God for guidance and forgiveness, but gives no excuse for avoiding the hard judgments as to what is likely to be evil, what good, for the quality of our life together as human beings;

(f) *Law and Gospel,* committing us to the goals of justice and equity in the operations of social institutions and structures and of laws and policies, without confusing these goals of justice for all with the good news of salvation by grace through the faith of individual believers.

### 4. Accepting Opportunities

4.1. The American Lutheran Church dedicates itself "to proclaim in word and deed . . . the Gospel of forgiveness and life everlasting through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Preamble to Constitution and Bylaws). It purposes a "faithful ministry of Word and Sacrament" (¶ 2.10.), "the quickening and sanctification of the members of its congregations through the use of the Means of Grace" (¶ 2.20.), and to assist in nurturing "children, youth, and adults in the covenant of their Baptism that they may grow in Christian faith and life" (¶ 2.23.).

4.2. The realm of human sexuality and sexual behavior is one to which this Church properly addresses itself. Questions and conflicts of the times confuse and divide Christians in their understandings of sexuality. The times hunger for good news, for reorientation from evil to good, for liberation from the many forms of bondage. The church's opportunity is to interpret afresh the two great commandments "Love God . . . love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:36-40). The opportunity is to give current meaning to "the desires of the flesh" as against "the desires of the Spirit" (see Gal. 5:16-25). The opportunity is to put disobedience of God's law (Rom. 1:18—2:16) into proper perspective, lest we forget that we too have sinned and are made right with God only by his gift (Rom. 3:21-26). (From the New Testament narratives it would appear that the sins easiest to confess and forgive are the social sins, those most difficult are the sins of pride and self-righteousness.) The church has the opportunity to be God's instrument for healing, including the rediscovery of the more excellent way (1 Cor. 13) that love offers. This love is of the quality God has for every human being. "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10).

4.3. God grants human beings the freedom to make their own decisions, even to displease him by their disobedience. Baptized children of the Father seek to please him by their obedience to what they believe is his will. They know that he loves them even when they are disobedient. They seek, nevertheless, to pursue the good (see Eph. 2:10), realizing that the credit, the honor, and the glory are to go to God (see Matt. 5:16). The church needs to underscore that in exercising their freedom to choose and to act Christians will heed Romans 6:1-2: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!" The reality of forgiveness and the release it gives the repentant sinner are God's gifts the church especially needs to communicate in these times.

## B. REJOICING IN OUR SEXUALITY

1. God created human beings male and female. Both are created in his image as persons of unique worth and dignity. Whether male or female, all persons share some physical attributes of the other sex. Qualities such as gentleness, compassion, helpfulness, and artistic appreciation often are regarded as feminine. Qualities such as assertiveness, initiative, vigor, and strength often are regarded as masculine. Yet, all are human qualities found in greater or lesser measure in all human beings, female and male. Differences in the sexuality of individual males and of individual females cover a wide range.

2. Whether one is male or female is far more complex to determine than most persons realize. Scientists tell us that one's gender is determined by one's chromosomes, gonads, hormones, internal reproductive organs, external genitalia, gender assigned at birth, gender identity accepted by the person, and gender of person chosen as sexual partner. Any defects in biological development or miscues in interpretation can confuse one's identity as male or female. Both nature and nurture combine to shape us as male or female, masculine or feminine. How this happens, how our sexuality both separates us and draws us together, remains a mystery. We gladly accept and celebrate as one of God's gifts this mystery of our sexuality.

3. Once we are known as male or female our families and our communities suggest how we are expected to speak and to behave in conformity with our gender. Nurturing calls for preparing us to live as members of the family, of the community, and of the Body of Christ. Part of this nurturing process equips us to understand and to accept, modify, or reject the gender roles taught us. Our learned gender roles predispose us throughout our lives toward conforming our sexual behavior to that which is expected of persons because they are identified as male or female.

4. Much of sexual behavior is learned, limited by the endowments the body provides and the freedom the mind permits. Satisfying the sexual drive, however, is of a different order from eating to still one's hunger pangs or drinking to slake one's thirst. Hunger and thirst deplete the body. One must have food and drink in order to survive physically. One need not engage in sexual intercourse either to survive physically or to enjoy physical and mental health. Celibacy is neither abnormal nor a denial of personhood. Sexual drives are so basic, however, that enough persons will be led into procreative behavior as to assure the survival of the human race.

5. All persons, nonetheless, need opportunities to relate wholesomely with persons both of their own and of the other sex. Human beings are created for fellowship, for sociability, for caring, and for the sharing of fears, hopes, and dreams. All persons, single or married, need avenues for the exchange of affectional, friendly, self-giving love. Such wholesome exchanges of caring between and among persons are an integral part of that community known as the Body of Christ.

6. Sexual behavior stimulated to the point of sexual arousal and release takes a variety of directions including: (a) masturbation; (b) heterosexual, with a person of the other gender; (c) homosexual, with a person of one's own gender; (d) bisexual, satisfied by both male and female; (e) with animals. Why persons express their sexuality so differently is in dispute. Some argue biological, others psychological, others cultural, others social explanations. Though the truth is not evident, reason would suggest that explanations be sought in the interplay between the person's genetic endowment and environmental influences. Understanding, however, does not condone sinful behavior. Heterosexual behavior even within marriage can be sinful when it becomes hurtful or exploitive.

## C. UPHOLDING MARRIAGE

1. Marriage takes many forms in human communities. The Bible records a number of ways in which men and women were united in stable, clearly defined relationships of sexual behavior. Marriage builds on the foundations of trust, mutual acceptance of agreed-upon roles and expectations, community sanction

and support, and long-term commitment. Inherent to marriage is sharing the experience of male/female sexual intercourse (1 Cor. 7:2-9).

2. The first marriage (Gen. 1:27) was of one man and of one woman, committed to one another in a covenant of lifelong fidelity. Jesus cites this original design for marriage in Matthew 19:3-6, where divorce is being discussed. He further points out that not all persons need marry (Matt. 19:10-12). Some deliberately remain celibate. Others have celibacy imposed upon them.

3. We believe that Scripture sets the standard of a lifelong monogamous marriage of one man and one woman. We believe that sexual intercourse reaches its greatest potential only within the committed trust relationship of marriage. In an age which falsely portrays and exploits sex, and confuses sex with love, many couples become disappointed with sex as they experience it. Sexual intercourse should be an expression of the love of husband and wife. Yet love is far richer and more inclusive than the sex act.

4. Sexual harmony is a goal a married couple should seek. Each partner yields to the other full devotion and selfless consideration. It is in this spirit that conjugal rights and obligations are granted and accepted. Neither lords it over the other nor insists selfishly on the rights and duties owed. Together husband and wife become one in love—a love that is mature, kind, considerate, self-giving, dedicated to the well-being and the fulfillment of the other as of the self, faithful to the beloved until death. Such love embraces the sexual.

5. Scriptures extol the joys of sexual behavior. Adam expresses joy over Eve. The Song of Solomon is a sensitively erotic poem of joy over the sexual expressions of love between a man and a woman. 1 Corinthians 7 frankly addresses the desirability of sexual behavior between husband and wife. A number of the psalms, notably Psalm 127 and Psalm 128, sing the blessings of a happy marriage. Yet Scriptures, particularly in Proverbs and the Prophets, also recognize the bitterness and pain of sexual behavior that estranges the sexes and alienates them from God.

6. Sexual behavior that violates human dignity and integrity is sinful. Scripture records such—rape, violence, incest, seduction, adultery, prostitution, and some forms of homosexual behavior as well as heterosexual behavior, to name the more obvious. But, the added message of Scripture is that these bring individual hurt or harm, and alienation from God and neighbor. Perhaps they bring a recognition of sin and the desire for forgiveness. In some instances they result even in death for the offenders and destruction of their society. The record of human experience down through the ages attests to the overwhelmingly undesirable consequences for persons and for communities when the basic patterns of human relationships are violated.

## D. JOINING IN PROCREATION

1. One of the purposes of marriage is for the partners to share in the pleasures —and the sorrows—of parenthood. Nurturing the young, in the spirit of Deuteronomy 6:4-8 and of Ephesians 6:4, is a major responsibility of fathers and mothers.

2. We would wish that every conception would be mutually desired, sought by both partners in its specific time and circumstance. Both partners should desire the child; both should be prepared to provide emotionally, spiritually,

physically, and socially for the child. So desiring, they join their bodies sexually, merging their lives and their genetic resources to create and bring forth a new human life. Implicit is the understanding that both parents willingly accept the risks and the responsibilities as well as the benefits and joys of parenthood. Should either partner bear hereditary traits that might impose serious genetic difficulties upon their child, we encourage them to seek competent genetic counseling.

3. Not all married couples have, nor should have, children. Some are involuntarily childless. Some feel neither a call to parenthood nor the capability to be good parents. Some feel that the earth already is over-populated and that stewardship calls for their voluntarily giving up the option of parenthood. Some prefer to adopt already-born children whose biological parents cannot or will not provide for them.

4. Considered use of safe, effective birth control methods facilitates responsible procreation. It enhances enjoyment of sexual intercourse without fear of unwanted pregnancy. Men and women are to be equally responsible for contraception and for procreation.

5. In defining the acceptable limits of controlling reproduction, we agree that voluntary sterilization may be an appropriate option. We view abortion as a fundamentally inappropriate means of birth control. Indeed, willful abortion—the sacrifice of a fetal life—is always an offense against God and the human spirit. There are, however, some circumstances under which abortion may represent a course of action that is more responsible than are other options. Careful counseling, considering the best of available information, and earnest prayer should precede any decision where abortion appears to be a responsible choice.

6. Artificial insemination, conception in which only one of a couple (the woman in present circumstances) provides genetic material and the other genetic material comes from an anonymous donor, becomes a consideration for some married couples. There are, however, such moral, emotional, and legal ambiguities that must be taken into account as to render the procedure suspect for a Christian. Questions of artificial insemination, sperm banks, in vitro fertilization, surrogate gestation, and genetic engineering are in need of critical study. These questions which a technological world raises provide an opportunity for the church to clarify its own attitudes and to resolve the many ambiguities in each issue.

## E. DEFILING GOD'S GIFT

1. Human beings are capable not only of good but also of evil uses of their sexuality. People are ready to exploit this fact to their own power or profit. Major industries are built up around satisfying "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16).

2. Among forms of exploitive sexual behavior against which Christians should be ready to work are those which:

(a) exploit children and youth, men and women, as in pornography and prostitution;

(b) take advantage of persons who are ill, helpless, dependent, handicapped, or of little power;

(c) endanger, cause physical or emotional injury, or do long-term harm;

(d) use threat, force, or prestige to persuade an otherwise unwilling person to engage in sexual behavior;

(e) engage promiscuously in a public quest for new sexual partners;

(f) break promises and violate commitments which people have made in the responsible exercise of their free will;

(g) build trade and commerce based on satisfying prurient interest;

(h) violate standards of public decency;

(i) invade the privacy and self-respect of others;

(j) magnify sexuality and sexual behavior in print, on screen, and on the stage in ways irrelevant to the product or incidental to the dominant theme.

3. Particularly despicable is behavior which uses the threat or the reality of physical and mental harm. Persons thought to be homosexual are harassed, beaten, even killed. Pimps force the prostitutes beholden to them to remain loyal or to suffer the consequences, including physical harm and abuse, even death. Preschool and young school-age children are lured into serving ruthless adults who profit from the sexual cravings of the child pornography market. ALC members must act against these evils in their communities.

## F. EXPRESSING CONCERNS THROUGH LAW

1. Laws express society's recognition that sexual behavior affects not only the participants but also the health, strength, and survival of the society itself. Christians must beware, however, of equating sin with crime. Nor dare they accept the proposition that because behavior is not against the law it therefore must be acceptable. Their concern must be for laws that foster justice, mercy, equality of opportunity, and the protection of basic human rights. Particularly difficult, in this light, is the task of attempting to draft laws which bear upon moral convictions not shared by all persons in the community. Reasonable persons can and must decide together what laws most likely will assure justice and mercy, opportunity and rights, for all.

2. In most American communities today the consensus of reasonable persons overwhelmingly would support laws that in the quest for justice and mercy, opportunity and rights:

(a) prohibit use of force or other forms of coercion in inducing persons to participate in sexual behavior against their will;

(b) protect children, youth, the retarded, the handicapped, and others unable to give informed consent against seduction, exploitation, or abuse;

(c) forbid entrapment and other illegal activities used to obtain evidence;

(d) require correcting or ending conditions that have been judged through due processes to be a public nuisance;

(e) safeguard public decency against actions or conduct patently offensive or likely to be offensive to the moral sense of the community;

(f) insure the civil and legal rights of every person so long as their exercise of these rights does not infringe on the privacy and the civil and legal rights of other persons.

3. On the other hand, there is much difference of opinion among reasonable persons as to the wisdom, fairness, or indeed the enforceability of laws that purpose to:

(a) label as criminal the private behavior of mutually consenting adults;

(b) eliminate or control trade in pornography that appears in print, on stage, or on the screen;

(c) outlaw adultery, incest, prostitution, sodomy, bestiality, and "offenses against nature";

(d) remove from the realm of criminal justice those forms of sexual behavior regarded as non-violent, non-coercive, non-exploitive, or "victimless";

(e) add "affectional preference" to the basic list of "sex, creed, race, color, or national origin" on the basis of which a person's civil liberties are protected;

(f) put the community on record as to the standards it upholds but expecting that the laws will not be enforced.

4. The foregoing outlines goals. Much discussion will be needed to apply these goals to specific situations. Christians ought to participate gladly in the consensus-seeking processes by which good laws are drafted.

## G. CONSIDERING HOMOSEXUALITY

1. We note the current consensus in the scientific community that one's preferred sexual behavior exists on a continuum from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual and that homosexual behavior takes a variety of forms. We believe it appropriate to distinguish between homosexual orientation and homosexual behavior. Persons who do not practice their homosexual erotic preference do not violate our understanding of Christian sexual behavior.

2. This church regards the practice of homosexual erotic behavior as contrary to God's intent for his children. It rejects the contention that homosexual behavior is simply another form of sexual behavior equally valid with the dominant male/female pattern.

3. We have reviewed the challenges to the traditional interpretations of those scripture passages that appear to proscribe homosexual behavior. We are not convinced by the evidence presented. Among passages cited as requiring interpretations different from the traditional interpretation are Genesis 18:16—19:29; Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13; Romans 1:24-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:10. While we see no scriptural rationale for revising the church's traditional teaching that homosexual erotic behavior violates God's intent, we nonetheless remain open to the possibility of new biblical and theological insights.

4. We agree that homosexually-behaving persons need God's grace as does every human being. We all need the care and concern of the congregation. We all need opportunity to hear the Word, to receive the sacraments, to accept the forgiveness God offers, to experience the understanding and the fellowship of the community of Christ. We all need the power of the Holy Spirit for ethical living sensitive to our own individual situations. So saying we nevertheless do not condone homosexual erotic behavior. Nor do we condone idolatry, pride, dis-

respect for parents, murder, adultery, theft, libel, gossip, or the other sins known in our circles. The sacrifice God finds acceptable from each of us is "a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart." Then he can answer our prayer for a "clean heart . . . a new and right spirit within me." (See Psalm 51.)

5. Truth, mercy, and justice should impel members of congregations of The American Lutheran Church to review their attitudes, words, and actions regarding homosexuality. Christians need to be more understanding and more sensitive to life as experienced by those who are homosexual. They need to take leadership roles in changing public opinion, civil laws, and prevailing practices that deny justice and opportunity to any persons, homosexual or heterosexual. We all need recognition and acceptance as human beings known to and loved by God.

## H. MINISTERING AS A CHURCH

### 1. Caring

1.1. The church's first concern is for people. The body of Christ is a caring community. It cares that each person be in right relationship with God, with neighbor, with nature, with social systems, and with self. It is a caring shared among all the members. It is a mark of Christian love and discipleship. It reaches out to those most in need—the widowed and the orphaned, the weak and the lowly, the despised and the rejected, the hurting and the confused, the lonely and the solitary.

1.2. In a couples- or family-oriented society single persons often feel themselves excluded. Caring congregations will make sure to involve single persons in the fellowship of the entire congregation. Single parent families also have special needs that require sensitive recognition by the congregation. So do those persons who feel themselves actually to be, or who prefer to be, members of the other sex. Other persons often overlooked are the handicapped, e.g., the mobility impaired, those suffering hearing or visual impairment, and the mentally retarded, as well as the institutionalized and the elderly. All need to feel the care of the congregation.

1.3. Teen and even pre-teen youth encounter a variety of pressures to become active in genital sexuality. They need education, encouragement, and support to rise above and to resist such temptations. Their situation calls for greater understanding and for careful and enlightened counseling when:

(a) their activity leads to unexpected pregnancy, often at a very early age;

(b) they become entrapped in pornography, prostitution, or drugs;

(c) they incur venereal diseases;

(d) they are seduced into sexual activity by a trusted authority or parental-type person;

(e) a member of their own family involves them in sexual intercourse;

(f) they realize their sexual behavior is more than they can handle emotionally but they see no way to stop;

(g) masturbation becomes a compulsive obsession.

1.4. Adults, whether single or married, likewise face sexual temptations. Libido knows no age limits. Christians, too, succumb to temptations and deviate from

acceptable sexual behavior. They may turn to the pastor or other trusted person for counsel. At such times they need empathetic understanding. They also need the word that one remains subject to God's law not only for one's personal good but for the good of the entire body of Christ. A caring community cannot sanction or condone a situation where each member does what appears good, right, and self-satisfying simply in that member's own eyes. No one can be a law solely to self; each lives in relationship with others.

1.5. Our Lord teaches the ideal for Christian living, as in the "Sermon on the Mount." Yet, he knew that being perfect is an unrealistic expectation in a sinful world. His mission was to seek out, to save, and to empower sinners for a better life. So it is today with the church as a vehicle for God's grace. The congregation is called to deal in healing ways that build sinners into, not cut them off from, the fellowship.

1.6. Pastors have a strategic role in the caring community. They must have come to terms with their own sexuality. Pastors must understand that there are many ways in which persons express their sexuality. Pastors are expected to uphold in their preaching and teaching the standards of Christian moral behavior, including sexual behavior. In their private counseling ministry they must deal in healing ways with persons who know they have fallen short of these standards. Many congregation members are inclined to see sexual sins as the worst sins. Pastors need to remind their congregations that sin takes many forms, most of them in realms other than the sexual. The beginning of sin is to forget the introduction to the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord thy God."

## 2. Teaching and Learning

2.1. The church's entire educational program needs to incorporate the "whole person" motif. Its curricula should recognize that all persons are sexual beings, whose words and deeds express their ideas of appropriate sexual behavior. The church seeks to place sexuality in the perspective of a person's wholeness, embodiment, self-acceptance, and participation in the entire range of human relationships. These relationships, it stresses, begin for a Christian with one's relationship with Jesus Christ. So large an assignment requires the leadership of competent, well-trained persons emotionally and intellectually capable of carrying out the responsibility.

2.2. The confirmation program presents a superb opportunity to bring to the youth of the church formal instruction on such matters as sex and sexuality, dating, selecting a mate, and standards of Christian conduct. By incorporating these matters normally into the broad sweep of confirmation instruction their relevance to the whole of Christian faith and life is underscored.

2.3. Ordinarily pastors and congregations should request that couples seeking marriage with the blessing of the church receive premarital counseling. This effort to prepare the prospective partners for the joys and perils of marriage we heartily endorse. Even more important is to offer early-marital counseling. This may be on an individual couple basis. Perhaps preferably it would involve groups of couples in similar stages of marriage building. The participants can learn from and help one another in realizing the possibilities of marriage and overcoming its problems. Skilled leadership, with expertise in human dynamics and in the processes of human relationships building, is required. Where pastors have such competence they well may be the leaders. Many times, however, pastors and con-

gregations would be wise to involve specialized lay or clergy persons in these marital counseling programs.

2.4. In its effort to improve the quality of its address to issues of human sexuality and sexual behavior the church needs to be a learning community. With diligence, but also with humility, the church wisely will:

(a) seek an understanding of God's underlying purpose and design in creating human beings male and female;

(b) place sexual behavior in its total context of relationships to God, to neighbor, to nature, to social systems, and to self;

(c) exalt the values inherent in such concepts as virginity, chastity, fidelity, commitment, trust, respect, and reverence;

(d) evaluate the probable effects upon persons and upon the community as a whole were particular behavior to become the typical, generally expected behavior;

(e) persevere in improving the ways it uses to teach parents, children, and others about human sexuality;

(f) clarify the many meanings of love, not only the erotic, but also the affectionate, the friendly, and the self-giving love which persons can express without entering into sexual intercourse;

(g) distinguish between attitudes and behavior to which the world may conform and those which redeemed disciples of the Lord, empowered by the Holy Spirit, honor as befitting their adoption through baptism into the heavenly Father's family.

### 3. Serving

3.1. A caring congregation provides a serving ministry. This serving ministry seeks to assure that social services are available to minister helpfully to persons in situations of critical need.

3.2. Specialized services often needed in this day include: (a) clinics dealing with victims of rape; (b) family planning centers; (c) marital and family counseling agencies; (d) genetic counseling centers; (e) child- and spouse-abuse shelters; (f) clinics treating chemically dependent persons; (g) programs for single parents; (h) assistance to the handicapped in meeting their particular needs; (i) sex therapy clinics for those who are sexually dysfunctional; (j) hospice services to help those nearing death live their remaining days meaningfully; and (k) employment and economic assistance programs so as to ease the economic tensions that so often affect sexual behavior.

3.3. No congregation alone can provide such an array of possible services. Specialized agencies are needed. Perhaps they will be organized through an association of congregations, Lutheran and/or ecumenical. More likely they will be organized on a community base. Any or all merit the understanding, encouragement, personal involvement, and financial support of members of congregations of The American Lutheran Church where local circumstances indicate the need. Competent and dedicated personnel are imperative for the effective functioning of such services. It is imperative, too, that the agencies be under continuing review to insure that the services are of high quality, consistent with what the agency sets out to do.

3.4. Social education and social action programs in the areas of human sexuality and sexual behavior are needed in the churches. Research is constantly going on, expanding the horizons of knowledge. Awareness is growing of the effects of social structures upon human beings in their sexual behavior. Attitudes toward matters sexual need reassessment. Members of ALC congregations need opportunity to discuss together their attitudes and expectations toward sexuality and sexual behavior. They may discover issues on which they should work together toward correcting unwholesome and advancing wholesome attitudes, behavior, and community standards.

3.5. Issues particularly urgent because developments are emerging so rapidly include:

(a) controls human beings are exerting over the reproductive processes;
(b) behavior manipulation, personality reshaping, and "mind control";
(c) definitions of the roles and behavior expected of males and of females;
(d) invasions of personal privacy and denials of responsible freedom for choice;
(e) rejection of the "image of God" understanding of the nature of human beings.

## I. RENEWING OUR MINISTRY

1. For many persons sexuality is so emotional a topic that they are uneasy at its mere mention. They hesitate to discuss sexuality with the dignity and respect it merits. To them various forms of sexual behavior are so abhorent that they would drive the sexual sinner from the fellowship. Yet in self-righteousness over feeling so superior to other persons they may incur the condemnation the Lord spoke in Luke 18:14.

2. The church often has left the impression that the "sins of the flesh" are largely sexual sins. It has neglected the implications of its understanding of the wholeness of the person—a body, mind, spirit being. It has seemed to be so fearful of the height and depth and breadth and mystery of human sexuality that it relegated sexuality to the unmentionables of procreation. Its moral pronouncements were strong on the Law, weak on the Gospel.

3. Our concern is that The American Lutheran Church reject this anti-sexual element in its tradition. Of course it will seek to combat the evils, the abuses, the corruption, the exploitation associated with human sexual behavior. It will teach positive values to overcome the false values our culture offers. The American Lutheran Church will emphasize the good, the beautiful, the personal- and community-building qualities inherent in human sexuality lived in accord with the whole counsel of God.

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